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A MESSAGE OF PEACE

and

A WORD OF WARNING

By

HAZRAT MIRZA NASIR AHMAD

(Head of the Ahmadiyya Movement in Islam)

(Address delivered by Hazrat Mirza Nasir Ahmad on 28th July, 1967, at the Wandsworth Town Hall, London, S.W.)

As Head of the Ahmadiyya Movement I have the honor to occupy a spiritual office. In that capacity, I am charged with responsibilities which I am not permitted to lay aside at any time till I draw my last breath. These responsibilities embrace all my fellow beings, every one of whom because of that fraternal bond, is dear to me.

Gentlemen, mankind finds itself at this moment at the brink of disaster. In that context I am the bearer of a momentous message for you and for all my brethren. Having regard to the occasion, I shall endeavour to make it brief.

My message is of peace and harmony and of hope for mankind. I earnestly hope that you will listen carefully to what I have to say and to ponder it with an open and enlightened mind.

The year 1835 occupies a place of pride in the human calendar. In that year a child was born in Qadian, an obscure village in the north of India. For generations his forbears had ruled the area around Qadian with great distinction. But the great house had fallen on lean days and lost much of its glory. The child that was born was no ordinary child. He was destined to bring about a great revolution not only in the realm of the spirit but also in the realm of matter. He was named Ghulam Ahmad by his parents and later became known to the world as Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad Qadiani. He was appointed by God, as the Messiah and the Mahdi.

Family records indicate that he was born on February 13, 1835. It was an age of ignorance. Not many people in that part of India were fond of learning. Hardly a few could read and write. Often a letter would remain unread for want of a reader.

The tutors engaged for the instruction of this child were not very learned. They taught him to read the Holy Quran. But they were not competent enough to impart even rudimentary instruction in the meaning

and spiritual profoundities of the Holy Book. They also gave him elementary instruction in Arabic and Persian. He learnt to read the two languages but did not acquire any proficiency in them. He studied some books on the indigenous system of medicine under the guidance of his father who was a renowned physician. This was the sum total of his formal education. True, he was fond of books and was usually occupied with reading them in his father's library. But as learning and scholarship were not much esteemed at the time, his father wanted him to assist him in managing his mundane affairs and to interest himself in them and win social esteem and popularity. Hence his father tried to dissuade him from his studies and warned him against becoming a bookworm.

It is clear that with such elementary education he could not have carried out the stupendous task entrusted to him by Allah. Therefore, Allah Himself became his guide and teacher and taught him the meaning of the Holy Quran, and the secrets of the spirit and of life. He illumined his mind with His own light and blessed him with the mastery of the pen, and with beauty and sweetness of expression and helped him write scores of books of unsurpassed brilliance and to deliver discourses which are rich repositories of learning and spiritual knowledge.

The time of his birth had been foretold by the earlier prophets and found prominent mention in their sayings and scriptures. I would here mention only one such prophecy, by the Holy Prophet Muhammad, Chief of the Prophets (on whom be peace). He had prophesied about the Mahdi more than thirteen hundred years before that a number of false claimants to the office of the Promised Messiah and Mahdi would arise among the Muslims. None of them would be the true Mahdi, except one, who will be a true follower of the Holy Prophet and to establish the truth of his claim two great heavenly signs will appear. These signs will be the solar and lunar eclipses which shall take place in the same month of Ramadhan. The lunar eclipse would occur on the first of the possible nights of such eclipses i.e. the 13th. The Solar eclipse would occur on the second possible days of such eclipses i.e. the 28th.

The fixing of the month of Ramadhan out of all the months of the year and again the fixing of definite dates of the eclipses was a mighty prophecy indeed. To foretell such a conjunction of events was to transcend beyond the limits of human knowledge. In fact when the time came the claimant actually appeared and declared himself to be the Mahdi and this was followed by the two heavenly signs—the two eclipses—as foretold with precision and exactitude. Most certainly this prophetic utterance of the Holy

Prophet, as events some thirteen hundred years later proved, was truly divinely inspired and of superhuman origin.

The prophecy was fulfilled in this manner. The child who was born in 1835, declared in 1891 that he was the Promised Messiah and Mahdi. In support of his claim he advanced numerous arguments and cited a large number of heavenly signs; and also presented to the world a number of his own prophecies some of which were fulfilled in his own time while the fulfilment of others took place later and continues to this day. The contemporary theologians rejected his claim. One of the reasons for this rejection put forward by them was that the prophecy of the Holy Prophet, namely, the one about the solar and the lunar eclipses which were to take place in a certain month and on certain dates and which was to be a sign of the truth of such a claimant, had not yet been fulfilled. Therefore, according to them, he could not be the true Mahdi. But the Omnipotent and Almighty God always keeps His promises and treats His sincere servants with love and constancy. In keeping with His promise and the prophecy of the Holy Prophet, the solar and lunar eclipses took place in the exact month and on the exact dates in 1894 and thus manifested to the whole world that the God of Muhammad (on whom be His peace and blessings) is All-powerful and Supreme. He showed this sign not once but twice, for it was repeated the following year in the western hemisphere. The two eclipses occurred in the precise month and on precise dates so that the people of the orient and the occident, of the new world and the old, should bear witness to the supreme glory and power of God and the truth of the Holy Prophet Muhammad and his spiritual son Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad. Great is the Holy Prophet who made this prophecy on the basis of divine knowledge and great is his spiritual son in whose person it was fulfilled.

From Muhammad (on whom be peace and blessings) to Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, in the course of thirteen hundred years, quite a few persons claimed to be Mahdis but the sun and the moon did not bear witness to the truth of anyone except in the case of Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad. This alone should be enough to make you to consider, dispassionately and earnestly, and ponder the claim of this claimant whose message I have the honor to convey to you this evening and by whose side the sun and the moon stood as eager witnesses to his truth and veracity.

So far about the sun and the moon; let us now, turn towards the earth and hear what it says. With the coming of the Promised Messiah and Mahdi strange and extraordinary upheavals and revolutionary changes, both physical and spiritual, were bound to take place. In fact all the various

revolutions and major historical changes are different dimensions of the same revolutionary process which was initiated with his advent as Mahdi and Messiah and bear witness to his truth. What is more, these upheavals are taking place as predicted by the Holy Prophet and by the Promised Messiah. Let me cite some examples.

During the early days of the mission of the Promised Messiah there was no eastern country that could rival the might of the civilized and powerful nations of the west. Then in 1904 it was revealed to him that soon certain eastern nations would emerge as important world powers challenging the supremacy of the West. Soon after Japan defeated Russia and established its claim as an eastern world power. Then, after the fall of Japan in World War II, China emerged as a great oriental power. The rise of these two nations as world powers changed the course of history and as the years go by their impact will be felt on an even vaster scale.

All this has happened in conformity with the Divine Will as revealed to the Promised Messiah.

Another important event of this age which profoundly influenced the whole world is the liquidation of the Czar and his imperialist regime and the triumph of communism. The Russian Revolution which seems to have changed the course of history took place exactly in keeping with the prophetic utterances of the Promised Messiah. It was in 1905 that he prophesied, on the basis of divine revelation, that the Czar of Russia and his family and their system of Government would face dire distress and be destroyed. It is a strange coincidence that within months of this prophetic announcement the foundation of a political party was laid which, some 12 or 13 years later, destroyed the monarchy and the royal house of the Czars. The eventual rise of communism and its vast ramifications are too well-known to need elaboration. Suffice it to say that the overthrow of the Czarist regime and the triumph of communism in Russia and elsewhere is a tragic chapter of human history which makes painful reading but which can on no account be ignored. No country in the world, including your own, has been immune against its impact. But we are neither surprised nor upset at the way events have moved. Their intensity, speed, and direction were all foretold by the Promised Messiah and will be found in due time to have contributed materially to the consummation of the divine scheme. It had been predicted and the prediction was graphic and detailed that in the days of the Mahdi and Promised Messiah, two great powers would emerge and the world would be split into two hostile camps. No other power would be strong enough to challenge their supremacy. They would eventually clash

and fight each other and perish in the process. This, however, is not the only war against which the Promised Messiah and the Mahdi warned. *He prophesied five major catastrophes of world dimensions.*

About the first World War, he declared that it would overtake the world suddenly. The world would be shocked. Travellers would be faced with great trouble. Rivers would turn red with blood. The young would be shocked into senility. Mountains would explode. The horrors of war would make people mad. It would be the time of the Czar's destruction. The seed of world communism would be sown. Fleets would be kept at combat ready. Great naval battles would be fought. Empires would be overthrown and cities would turn into graveyards.

This holocaust was to be followed by another world war of even vaster dimensions and deadlier consequences. This was to change the map of the world and reshape the destinies of nations. Communism was to appear as a world force and begin dictating terms. Vast areas were to fall under its sway. That is exactly what happened after the second World War. Many countries of Eastern Europe turned communist and 700 million people of China followed. The emerging nations of Africa and Asia are greatly influenced by communism. The world is divided into two hostile camps, each armed to the teeth with the latest sophisticated weapons ready to hurl mankind into a burning hell of death and destruction.

The Promised Messiah also prophesied that a third world war of even bigger dimensions would follow the second. The two opposing camps will clash with such suddenness that everyone will be caught unawares. Death and destruction will rain from the sky and fierce flames shall engulf the earth.

The colossus of modern civilisation will tumble to the ground. Both the communist and the opposing blocks will perish in the process. Russia and its satellites on the one hand and the U.S. and its allies on the other, shall be destroyed, their might broken, their civilization ruined and their systems shattered. The survivors shall stand aghast and amazed at the tragedy. Russia will recover sooner from the calamity than the West. The prophecy is clear that the Russian population will recover and multiply rapidly. They will be reconciled to their Creator and will accept Islam and the Holy Prophet of Islam. A people who are seeking to wipe out the name of God from the earth and to drive Him out of the skies will realize the folly of their ways and at long last submit to Him as staunch believers in His Unity and Oneness.

You may consider this a fantasy. But those who survive the third world war will witness and bear out the truth of what I have said. *These are the*

words of God Almighty. They shall be fulfilled. No one can avert His decree.

The end of the third world war will be the beginning of the triumph of Islam. People will accept its truth in large numbers and will realize that Islam alone is the true religion and that the emancipation of man is to be won through the message of Muhammad alone (on whom be the peace).

All these events are important landmarks in the history of man. The emergence of Japan and later of China as world powers on the oriental horizon, the complete annihilation of Czarist Russia, the triumph of communism and its growing influence in the world at large, the first great war that changed the map of the world and the second world war which brought about a cataclysmic upheaval in the world, are no ordinary events. They happened as had been prophesied. We must remember that the Promised Messiah fulfilled his mission and passed into the mercy of Allah on May 26, 1908. All these prophecies had been given wide publicity long before.

It is certain, therefore, that the revelation and prophecies about the ultimate and universal triumph of Islam will also come to pass in their own good time. For they are links of the same chain.

The sign of the revival of Islam are already visible. They may not be very clear yet but they are easily discernible. The sun of Islam will finally rise in its full splendour and illumine the world. But before that happens the world must experience another war—a bloodbath—that will leave mankind shaken and chastened.

But, gentlemen, let us not forget that *this prophecy, like all prophecies, is a warning and its fulfillment can be delayed or even averted provided man turns to his Lord*, repents and mends his ways. He can yet avert Divine wrath if he stops worshipping the false deities of wealth, power and prestige, establishes a genuine relationship with his Lord, refrains from all transgression, does his duty to God and man, and learns to work for true human welfare. It all depends on the nations that dominate the world today and who are intoxicated by the heady wine of wealth, power and prestige. Are they willing to shake off this state of inebriation? Are they eager for spiritual bliss and happiness?

If not, Divine wrath is bound to descend. If they do not give up their evil ways and persist in their arrogance, no power and no false gods shall avail them aught against the promised chastisement.

Be kind, therefore, to your own selves and to your children! Listen to the voice of your Lord, Most Gracious, Ever Merciful. May He smile on you with compassion and grant you the strength and the opportunity to accept

and to profit from the truth.

Now a word about the spiritual revolution which Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, the great spiritual son of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (on whom be the peace and blessings of Allah) was destined to bring about. We must recall that at the time of his advent the world of Islam was passing through a period of extreme helplessness and decadence. Muslims were poor and ignorant. Industrially they were backward and had lost their initiative in commerce and business. Political power had deserted them. Nowhere in the world did they enjoy real independence. Morally they were bankrupt and were suffering from an acute sense of frustration. They had lost even the will to rise and join the living nations of the world. Islam was being attacked on all sides and there was no one to defend it. Christianity was the most bitter and the most active of its enemies. Its missionaries had gone out to all parts of the world, leading a bitter onslaught against Islam. Christian money and political power were ready and eager to help. Their main target was always Islam. Christianity was so confident of its victory that its advocates had triumphantly declared:

1. The continent of Africa was in their pocket.
2. There would not be a single Muslim left in India.
3. The time had come to hoist the flag of Christianity over Mecca.

As against all this Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad was alone except for a few penniless Muslims who had gathered round him. He had no power, no money and no political backing. But He Who is Lord and Master of all was his Helper. It was He who commissioned him to proclaim to the world that the days of the revival of Islam were at hand, and that the day was not far when Islam would triumph over all other faiths through its spiritual power.

A word of explanation, however, before I proceed further. Islam teaches and we Muslims all sincerely believe, that Jesus Christ was a righteous prophet of God and that his mother was a model of virtue. Both are spoken of in the Quran as worthy of veneration; indeed Mary is mentioned in the Quran as an example of purity and is referred to more reverently there than in the Gospels. The Quran, however, condemns with the utmost severity, their exaltation into divinities by the Church. That, and the refusal of the Church to accept the Holy Prophet Muhammad (on whom be the peace) have become the sharp dividing lines between Church Christianity and Islam.

The Promised Messiah has said:

"I am constantly cogitating over the possibility of a decision between us and Church Christianity. My heart bleeds over the errors of worshipping the

dead. For, what could be more painful than that a humble human being should be worshipped as God and a mere handful of dust be proclaimed as the Lord of all the worlds. I would have died of grief long before if God, Who is my Lord and Master, had not comforted me that the Unity of Allah will triumph in the end; all other deities will perish; false gods will be stripped of their alleged divinity; the period of Mary being worshipped as Mother of God will come to an end; and the doctrine of the divinity of her son too will die. God Almighty says (in the Quran): If I so will, Mary and her son Jesus and all who inhabit the earth shall perish. Now, He has willed that the false divinity of both of them should suffer death. The two divinities, therefore, must die. No one can save them. With them shall die all those propensities which prompted obedience to false gods. There will be a new heaven and a new earth. The days are near when the sun of truth shall rise in the West and Europe shall come to know the true God. Thereafter the door of repentance shall close. For, those who desired to enter will have entered with eagerness. Only those will remain without whose hearts are sealed by nature, who love not light but darkness. All faiths shall perish except Islam and all weapons shall break except the heavenly weapon of Islam which shall neither break nor be blunted until it smashes the forces of darkness into bits. The time is close at hand when the pure Unity of God that even dwellers of deserts who are ignorant of all faiths, feel in their hearts, will spread throughout. On that day no false redemption or false god shall survive. One blow of the divine hand will nullify all machinations of disbelief, but not with the sword or the gun but by means of enlightening a number of souls with divine light and by imbuing pious hearts with divine effulgence. Only then will you understand what I say." (Tabligh-i-Risalat: Vol. vi pp. 8, 9).

Since these prophetic utterances were made the world of religion has been completely transformed. The vast continent of Africa instead of joining the ranks of Christianity is gathering under the banner of Islam. In India, the Christian missionaries fight shy of facing even inexperienced young Ahmadis. The wish of hoisting the Christian flag over Mecca remains and shall even remain a vain desire.

The signs of the fulfilment of the prophecies about the victory of Islam are becoming more and more evident. I have just discussed the prophecy about the third world war after which Islam will triumphantly emerge in its full glory and I have also pointed out that this catastrophe can be averted through sincere contrition and by treading the path of virtue as taught by Islam. It is for you to choose and save yourselves and your children by establishing a true relationship with God based on certainty and conviction

or to doom yourselves and your progeny to total annihilation by opting for paths that lead away from Him. The Divine Warner has warned you in the name of God and His Messenger the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of God be on him). He has done his duty. It is my prayer that God grant you the strength and courage to do your duty. Let me conclude in his own words:

"Remember, God has informed me of many earthquakes. Rest assured, therefore, that as earthquakes have shaken America and Europe so will they shake Asia. Some of them will resemble the Day of Doom. So many people shall die that rivulets of blood shall flow. Even the birds and the beasts will not be immune against this death. A havoc shall sweep the surface of the earth which shall be the greatest since the birth of man. Habitations shall be demolished as if no one had ever lived in them. This will be accompanied by many other terrible calamities which the earth and the heavens will send forth, till their extraordinary nature will become evident to every reasonable man. All the literature of science and philosophy shall fail to show their like. Then mankind will be sore distressed and wonder what is going to happen. Many shall escape and many perish. The days are near, in fact, I can see them close at hand, when the world shall witness a terrible sight. Not only earthquakes but also many fearsome calamities shall overtake man, some from the skies and some from the earth. This will happen because mankind have stopped worshipping their true God and have become lost in the affairs of the world with all their heart and their effort and their intent. If I had not come these afflictions would perhaps have been delayed a little. But with my coming the secret purposes of an affronted God which were hidden so far, became manifest. Says God:

'We never punish unless We send a Messenger.'

Those who repent shall find security and those who fear before calamity overtakes them shall be shown mercy. Do you think you will be immune from these calamities? Or can you save yourselves through artifice or design? Indeed not. That day all human schemes shall fail. Think not that earthquakes visited America and other continents but that your own country shall remain secure. Indeed, you may experience a greater hardship. O Europe, you are not safe and O Asia, you too, are not immune. And O dwellers of Islands, no false gods shall come to

(cont. on page 31)

THE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF ISLAM

by

Dr. Rab Nawaz Malik

Associate Professor of Philosophy and Politics

University of Wisconsin, Richland Center, Wisconsin

I begin this essay with a few but important presuppositions. It is self-evident, I venture to suggest, that religious beliefs among humans are as old as humanity itself. Our primitive ancestors, although not capable of communicating with God directly [1], were nonetheless committed to a certain set of beliefs, i.e., a "religion" and many even worshipped in their own way. Recent anthropological studies show beyond reasonable doubt that even today some inhabitants of remote areas of Australia, Indonesia, and the rain forests of the Philippines still believe in primitive religions and pattern their conduct in accordance with their religious beliefs—beliefs that almost invariably include a concept of some sort of a deity.

It is equally evident that there appear to be certain psychological, sociological, and indeed physiological factors which tend to indicate that humanity "needs" religion [2]. Was it not because of this that Voltaire suggested that if there were no God we would have to invent one? Surely, then, religion fulfills a deep human need and concept of a God is fundamental to it. Contrary to what the materialists or the atheists or the agnostics of today may allege, religious feelings and interests are not mere throwbacks of the past or "an opiate of the people" of the present. In fact, they (religious feelings and interests) have as much to do with the future and the present as with the past. Religion is part of that natural urge in man to transcend his immediate situation, go beyond himself, to discern his true identity, i.e., to discover and understand his own nature, and formulate the goals of his life.

It can, for example, be argued with a certain degree of plausibility that man desires a sense of continuity longer than the human life span, a sense of shared commitment with other humans, and a sense of belonging that go beyond the immediate present. At times this search for self-discovery or

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1. According to the Muslim view, Adam was the *first man* in the sense that he was capable of receiving revelation from God (see the Holy Quran 1:31)
 2. James, William: *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, Mentor Book, N.Y., 1964.

quest for identity may appear to have parochial, or nationalistic, or materialistic aspects because of shared memory of the past, i.e., common heritages, and shared experiences of the present, and a longing for a certain kind of future. But all kinds of senses of identity essentially remain incomplete without a spiritual component—an awareness of a relationship with God, an active, imminent Creator. This is so because man in essence is a spiritual being. To deny this is to deny the simple historical fact that religion has always played a predominant role in all societies at all times. Our codes of conduct, our values, our customs and habits of thought, in short our mores and folkways have always been powerfully influenced by our religious beliefs. Is it not probable that they will continue to be so in the future? Furthermore, it can hardly be denied that religion has been the most vital civilizing force in the history of mankind. Religious precepts have, through the ages, molded human life and character in a radical way. They have inspired men to deeds of great courage, unsurpassed sacrifice, and limitless compassion. At its best, religion (at least Islam, properly understood) exerts the most profound humanizing influence on man. It broadens his sympathies, inculcates tolerance, promotes the spirit of self-sacrifice and social service. Finally, and perhaps most important, it removes artificial distinctions between man and man.

When religion is viewed generically (i.e., as a commitment to a set of beliefs) the term lends itself to wider dimensions. Viewed in this fashion it is possible to talk of secular as well as non-secular religions. Surely in some important respects communism, socialism, nationalism, capitalism and various other "isms" take on theological connotations. Nonetheless, it must be understood that their concerns remain non-spiritual and essentially this worldly only. Take for instance revolutionary Marxism. It has all the trappings of a theological system. It can legitimately lay claim to a "prophet"—Karl Marx—and a "sacred" book—*Das Capital*. And also, the missionary zeal of the "true believers" is certainly second to none. One of the things that is missing is the spiritual component. In addition to these secular creeds there are as many, if not more, non-secular religions or systems of beliefs—Hinduism, Christianity, Islam to name a few. The obvious result is the baffling multiplicity of religious creeds (both secular and non-secular) around the world, each claiming superiority over all others, and each competing with all the rest for our attention. Now the choice before us is to ascertain—to find out—to choose—which religion among all these is worthy of our personal commitment. The logic of sheer self-interest, if nothing else, dictates that we ought not to step onto a sinking boat. We must

for our own sakes climb aboard a sturdy ship—with a capable captain at the helm—so as to enable ourselves to negotiate the stormy seas and reach the distant, albeit, safe shore. In this voyage of life there is no other worthwhile alternative.

In our judgement, the ship that we have alluded to is the ship of Islam—the natural religion of mankind. Therefore, in the following pages, we shall make a serious attempt to delineate the fundamental principles of Islam in terms easily understandable by the new convert. While doing so, we may well succeed in dispelling some of the misconceptions about Islam prevalent among non-Muslims as well as Muslims.

I. THE PRINCIPLES OF ISLAM

The proposition what is Islam and its major concerns, leads one to ask the following questions. What is the Islamic conception of God? What relationship exists between man and his Creator? What is the purpose of man's creation, and indeed of all creation; In one capsule, what is this universe all about? These are essentially the questions we shall have to consider before we are able to comprehend what may be termed the Muslim World View. Without exaggerated preoccupation with etymological jigsaw puzzles, we may say, for the sake of greater clarity and better understanding of the matter at hand, that the Arabic word "Islam" literally means "submission"—that is to say, submission to the will of Allah. The adjective "Muslim" is derived from the same root-verb as Islam and means one who has submitted, one who has accepted Islam as his faith. To call a Muslim "Mohammedan" is incorrect. Such a form of address is likely to offend him, for it is tantamount to associating his religion with a human being, albeit exalted, and not with the Almighty Himself.

Islam is emphatically a monotheistic religion and has a founder and a Holy Book. The Quran is the Holy Book of Muslims and is regarded by them in a literal sense as the revealed, eternal word of God. Unlike the Bible, it is not merely a "Book of God," but the actual word of God as it was revealed to Muhammad, the Prophet (peace be on him). It is the final command [3]

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3. When I say that the Quran is the "final command of God to mankind" I do not mean that God no longer speaks to His servants. This would amount to saying that at least one of God's attributes has fallen into disuse and would be contrary to the notion of a living God, of whose guidance we are constantly in need. The Quran is the final command of God only in the sense that the future commands of God will be in harmony with the Quranic injunctions.

of God to mankind, and its message is universal in as far as it makes "provisions for guidance in every respect for all peoples for all times [4]." The Quran recognizes all past religious doctrines as fundamentally true, but insists that, because of human tampering, all those religions have lost their purity and have become jumbles of mutually contradictory notions. This position makes it possible for the Muslims to claim that the Quran contains a synthesis of true past religious doctrines, and, over and beyond, provides guidelines for future actions for all peoples. God Himself vouchsafed its perfection. We find in the Quran:

"It is a perfect Book; there is no doubt in it; It is a guidance for the righteous." (The Quran, 2:3) [5]

and again:

"This day have I perfected your faith for you and have completed my favors and blessings unto you, and I have chosen Islam as your religion." (The Quran, 5:4)

Thus, it is to the Quran that we must turn to understand the universe, to discover answers to all our questions, to seek solutions to all of our problems—material, moral, and spiritual—and to look for guidance in all our activities in this voyage of life. It is through the Quran, hence from God, that we learn of God, of His relation to man, of His relation to the rest of His creation. It is the only perfect guide for all mankind. It is the fountain of Muslim cosmology. Without specific reference to its commands, the establishment of Muslim institutions of any kind would seem unthinkable. As Hazrat Ahmad, the founder of the Ahmadiyya Movement in Islam pointed out:

"The Holy Quran sets before itself the grand and all-embracing object of furnishing a true remedy for all kinds of evil and gives direction for the guidance of all men." [6]

Such a document can only be described as revolutionary, and that it certainly was. It was revolutionary in the sense that it demanded a complete break with the past. Old habits and customs were to be swept away and a

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4. Zafrulla Khan M. *Islam: Its Meaning for Modern Man*, Harper and Row, New York, 1962, p. 86.
 5. The Holy Quran, Sura Al-Baqarah, Verse 3. (references to the Holy Quran are hereafter given only by the sura (chapter number and the number of the verse.)
 6. Ahmad, Hazrat *The Philosophy of the Teachings of Islam*, The Am. Fazal Mosque, Washington, D. C., 1953, p. 85.

new order of things established. It replaced all former authorities. It was a new Grand Design for all people and all generations. It asked men to disbelieve and disobey the old; or, rather, it asked men to believe in better things—better customs, better laws. God has made His intentions clear in the Quran, which every man could read for himself and pattern his life in accordance with its tenets. This makes the individual responsible for his actions and accountable directly to God Himself. The only point to be made here however is that the early Muslims were rebels who wanted things different from what they had been. They were determined to destroy all former authorities and replace them with a new one. Henceforth, the Quran was to be the supreme and infallible guide in all things and for all peoples. The Muslim mind can hardly conceive of *any* phase of human life apart from theology—so all-pervasive is the role of religion in the life of a Muslim. To the faithful, Islam is not merely an elaborate and fixed body of pertinent rituals to please an all-powerful God, but, more important, it is a system of beliefs—cosmological, theological, and ethical—a system suitable for the needs of an ever changing world. Its tenets stipulate a proper code of conduct for the individual, the nature of the political, social, and economic institutions, and the spiritual life of the community of believers. Islam makes no distinction between the material and the spiritual, the secular and the religious. Its teachings are all-encompassing and comprehensive. It deals with existence in its totality. No region of man's life is left out of consideration. In brief, everything was revealed and no one might add to or subtract from the revelation. Man's only duty was to follow the commands of Allah—the one and only God.

Thus, we need not be surprised at the fervor and enthusiasm with which the faithful took it upon themselves to implement the will of God. As a result, a little community in Medina grew with astonishing rapidity into a world-wide religion, and its magnificent achievements are now a part of the human heritage. Islam has been able to make a permanent mark upon civilization, and its future also seems glorious, thanks to the world-wide efforts of the Ahmadiyya Movement.

II. THE ISLAMIC CONCEPT OF GOD

Professor Gilson in his remarkable little book, "*God and Philosophy*,"⁷ suggests that the concept of God is "the biggest of all metaphysical problems [7]." It is instructive to note that Professor Gilson does not say that such questions (e.g., Does God exist? What is His nature? How does He relate to

7. Gilson, Etienne. *God and Philosophy*, Yale University Press, 1963, p. ix.

(His creation?) are scientific questions or questions relating to some other specific disciplines. He insists—and I think rightly—that all questions about God, by their very nature, are preeminently metaphysical.

One knows that this position is indeed debatable and has in fact been a topic of debate in the philosophy of religion. However, I find myself in agreement (at least in principle) with Professor Gilson. Hence, I desire to push the point a bit further.

It seems to me that science can only ask scientific questions, and any and all questions about the nature of God are distinctly non-scientific. Science deals with matter, but God is a non-material substance. Therefore, belief in God is not susceptible to empirical verification as hypotheses of physical and natural sciences. It is because of this that the many attempts to provide purely rational justification for God's existence have always fallen short of their lofty objectives. The problem, as I see it, is as follows. In spite of the overpowering influence of science and technology in the modern world, can we not still rationally pose questions—concerning nature, creation, existence, and what the universe is all about—other than those that are scientifically answerable? If we cannot ask such questions, then any discussion about God is merely an exercise in futility—a sheer waste of time. Such a position will logically lead us to dismiss all positive religions as anthropomorphic superstitions, and a great mass of faltering humanity will be left with no guide whatsoever. For masses of the world's population are not even familiar with the scientific method, and one may imagine that most of these do not even think about it. The few who pretend to be in possession of such knowledge will create new gods for themselves. They may end up by following Newton, Marx, Freud, Sartre, or some other. On the other hand, if we can ask such questions, then there seems to be no reason to stop at the "Author of Nature" in Newtonian physics or Marxist "classless society" with all their delightful ambiguities.

One becomes depressingly aware of the oft-repeated and somewhat arrogant claim that science can solve all our problems, so all-pervasive—for good or for ill—has become the influence of science in our times. However, when one begins to wonder whether there is such a being as God and why He exists (if He exists at all), one is never aware of raising a scientific question. Nor does one hope to gain for it a scientific solution.

After all, science deals only with the "what" and not the "why" of given existences. For example, physics, chemistry, and biology can tell us much, but certainly not all, about the nature of change in the world. But what we cannot know through these sciences is why this world, with all its seeming

harmony and order and intelligibility, exists. We need something other than the guidance of science to find answers to such questions; if such answers are to be found. Islam says: turn to the Quran, to God. It is through God that we can hope to understand the world, and indeed God Himself.

The first, and by far the most important, attribute of God, according to Islam, is His unity. Everything else is subordinated to and follows from this concept. Muslim scholars are in agreement that:

"The central pivot around which the whole doctrine and teaching of Islam revolves is the unity of the Godhead. From this concept proceeds the fundamental unity of the universe, of man, and of life." [8]

The Holy Quran substantiates this argument in several places. A few examples should suffice:

"Your God is one God." (The Quran, 16:23)

"...They may know that He is the only one God." (The Quran, 14:53)

'Allah! there is no God but He.' (The Quran, 64:14)

So emphatic is the Quran about the doctrine of the unity of God that to deny it is not mere blasphemy but automatically invites anathema. The main object of God's revelation is to emphasize this matter. To associate partners or to regard anything or any being equal to God, directly or indirectly, is indubitably prohibited. The Holy Quran instructs us thus:

"Say: 'He is Allah the One; Allah the Independent, and besought of all. He begets not, nor is He begotten; and there is none like unto Him. (The Quran, 112:2-5)

The questions. Why should there be only one God? Why could there not be more than one? immediately present themselves. We find in the Quran that such a situation would have resulted in chaos and confusion. The first problem would have been to decide which god was to create what. Furthermore, every god would like to have taken away what he had created. Above all, some gods would surely have dominated over others. The situation can be likened to the Hobbesian "state of nature" where every god would be at war with every other god, and there would be no peace, no order, no harmony, no certainty [9]. To avoid these godly wars, it would seem paramount that there should be one God—eternally necessary and necessarily eternal. This is a significant point, if we keep in view the mythological gods of ancient Greece and their mutual rivalries and incessant intrigues. Ch. Muhammad Zafrulla Khan, an eminent Pakistani jurist,

8. Zafrulla, Khan, M., *op. cit.*, p. 91.

9. The Quran 23:92-93

statesman, and scholar, in his book, "*Islam: Its Meaning for Modern Man*," advocates this view forcefully. He says:

"Mythology furnishes ample illustrations of the confusion and chaos that would prevail if there were plurality of gods. There would be an end to all certainty and order and consequently to all beneficence. Man and the universe instead of being manifestations of divine beneficence would present a spectacle of capricious and cruel sport." [10]

Besides repudiating the idea of plurality of gods, the above passage is instructive in many other respects. We notice that according to Islam there is order in nature; the universe is not just a chaotic conglomeration of material phenomena. Further, "certainty and order" are necessary conditions for divine beneficence, although left to themselves they are not sufficient for God's grace and bounty. More important, both man and the Universe and all that is in it are the manifestations of God's majesty and glory. We make this last point in passing and later will return to it, discussing it in detail when we come to the concept of man in Islam. Coming back to the point at issue—plurality of gods and its consequences—we find that the Holy Quran supports, in no uncertain terms, the position taken by the author quoted above. The Holy Book teaches us:

"If there had been in the heavens and the earth other gods beside Allah, then surely both would have gone to ruin. (The Quran 21:23)

Thus we see that the Quran and Muslim Scholarship are at one on this point.

The next question we may consider is, How can we know that God exists? The Holy Quran teaches us that God does not depend upon frail and lowly creatures like ourselves—who, after all, are here because of His grace and mercy—in order to be revealed to the world. The idea that man discovers his own Creator is revolting to a Muslim, because it puts the Almighty under an obligation to man. It implies that, if man had not made the effort to discover his own Creator, He would never have become known to His own creation. It would be presumptuous of man to assert such a proposition. It would amount to man's playing God. According to Quranic teachings, God reveals Himself to mankind, instead of waiting to be discovered. In that way, He may never be discovered—given the imperfection of man and the limited amount of knowledge he can acquire. Time and time again does God Himself affirm and bear witness to His existence, unity, and other attributes. We find in the Quran:

"Allah bears witness that there is no God but He—and so do the angels

10. Zafrulla, Khan, M. *op. cit.*, p. 92.

and those possessed of knowledge—Maintainer of Justice; there is no God but He, the Mighty, the Wise." (The Quran 3:19)

The "knowledge" here apparently means revealed knowledge, for it is revealed knowledge that is really true and certain—being, as it is, God's own word. Nonetheless, the verse just quoted presents a difficulty. It suggests that God entertains serious doubts about man's capacities to discover His existence by rational speculation. Anyone who is familiar with philosophers' attempts through the ages to prove God's existence by reason alone, will not find this objectionable. Such attempts have invariably failed. One finds the ontological argument as unsatisfactory as the argument from the parity of cause and effect. And the rest do not seem to improve matters.

Be that as it may, from the Quranic verse we can judge that God must become the witness of His own existence and the explainer of His own nature, if His true nature is to become known at all. Therefore, in the first instance we seemingly have to believe that God exists, that He speaks and has in fact spoken, and that what He says is true. Secondly, we must also believe that all that contradicts the word of God is false. This certainly is nothing more, although nothing less, than a leap of faith. Perhaps there is such a thing as the *will* or the *right* to believe, as William James taught us [11].

This brings us to the second central point in Muslim theology. Belief in God is a matter of faith; no irrefutable rational justification of His existence is possible. The study of natural phenomena—the sun, the moon, the stars, and all the planets—or the apparent order that seems to regulate the universe may lead us to the conclusion that there probably is a Creator, but to deduce actual existence from probability is surely a strange way to prove the existence of a being. The difference between probability and certainty is vast indeed. Moreover, our knowledge about nature is never perfect. It is fraught with pitfalls and inaccuracies, and it seems at times that there are in it more arguments than there is substantial reality. It is precisely because of this that all attempts (and such attempts have been numerous) to offer rational proof to demonstrate God's existence have come to naught. The problem is: Can we demonstrate the existence of a non-material substance—God—by arguing from the existence of a material substance—nature—and still be logically consistent? It appears doubtful. Such an effort will be entirely misdirected, for it amounts to discovering the Almighty from under the heaps of matter. One hastens to point out that this line of argument is by no means foreign to

[11] James, William: *The Will to Believe*, Dover, New York, 1956.

Islam:

The material universe cannot lead us to an irrefutable conclusion, to absolute certainty regarding the existence of its Author. The commensurate and perfect arrangement which the eye discovers in the universe comprising countless heavenly bodies and the numerous wonders which are disclosed to thinking minds in nature have never led and can never lead to firm conviction, to the perfect certainty that truly there exists a God. [12]

This paragraph is highly significant, for several reasons. It affirms that knowledge about God, His existence, and His nature, must be clear, convincing, true, perfect—in short, indubitable. Here, we are not dealing with the uncertainties of a scientific hypothesis, but with irrefutable, eternal, objective, and final truth. It is obvious that study of nature alone cannot help us arrive at this irreducible truth—a conviction about the existence of God. May we turn to the same author once again?

Imperfect human reason cannot comprehend nor the material eye discover this mysterious Being, who, hidden, like heat, in every soul, is invisible to all. A true knowledge of His existence has been attended with the greatest difficulties, and blunders have been made concerning His Being. Superstition and gross credulity have accorded the homage due to Invisible God to frail creatures and material objects [13].

This passage is equally forceful. It explicitly asserts that knowledge derived from human reason alone cannot be perfect and that it is not given to the finite intellect of man to fathom the august desings of divine Providence. Man can neither discover nor comprehend God, who, we are told, is a mystery—inanimate and invisible and apparently intelligible only to those who already have faith. Further, it points to terrible mistakes that have been made by those who have tried to discover God in nature. Some of them have ended by associating Him with all kinds of worldly objects—cows, monkeys, and the like.

Thus, we come to the point which has already been discussed in some detail, i.e., we know about God with certainty because He Himself proclaimed to us, "I am." We notice here the importance of revelation in Islam. *To find God, to know His nature, our reason can be of help, but it must be supplemented by revelation. Reason, left to itself, is helpless.* We may deduce the probable existence of God by studying nature, but the

12. Ahmad, Hazrat, *op. cit.*, pp. 81-82.

13. Ahmad, Hazrat, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

spiritual way, the gushing fountain of revelation, is the only way to find the Creator with certainty. In other words, unless God manifests Himself through revelation to His servants, we cannot be certain of His existence. Therefore, the need for continuous revelation.

Thus far, we have investigated two aspects of the Islamic concept of God. Now we need to discuss His nature. The Holy Quran teaches us that the only way to apprehend God's nature is through His attributes. The attributes imputed to the Almighty by the Holy Book are not terribly different from the ones we find in the New and Old Testaments. A list of God's attributes, prepared by a Jew, a Christian, or a Muslim, will by and large, tend to be strikingly similar. There are many of them and it is not possible here fully to explain all. Hazrat Mahmood Ahmad has listed one hundred and three [14].

The attributes of God in Islam are the conventional monotheistic attributes: God is the Creator, the only cause of all creation:

"The originator of the heavens and the earth!" (6:102)

"The Creator of all things." (6:103)

He is eternal in that He always has been and always will be; He is a Perfect Being and nothing else approaches His perfection. He is all-powerful, all-knowing, all-good. He is just, merciful, loving, and compassionate. However, Islam emphatically rejects the doctrine of the Trinity. For Muslims, God is one in the absolute sense. Nothing can be associated with Him in any shape or form. The Holy Quran is quite explicit on the subject. It says:

"No one participates with God in His person and attributes." (The Quran, 42:12)

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14. Ahmad, Hazrat Mahmood, *Introduction to the Study of the Holy Quran*, London, Mosque, 1949, pp. 412-416. These attributes are said to be either explicitly stated in the Holy Book or can be inferred from the Quranic text. They are generally divided into three divisions:

1. "Those that are peculiar to God and are not related in any way to His creatures"—they are the Living, the Gracious, etc.
2. "Those that are related to the creation of the Universe"—they are Creator, Sovereign, etc.
3. "Those that come into operation in consequence of the good or bad actions of such of God's creatures as are endowed with free will"—they are: the Judge, the Merciful, etc.

For elaborate analysis of this subject the reader is referred to page 416 of this reference.

and again:

"Do not liken Him to any of His creatures." (The Quran, 16:75)

It is true that the Quran recognizes God as Seeing, Hearing, Knowing, Creating, and so forth, but warns us at the same time not to liken Him to anything which our senses can comprehend.

John T. Robinson, the influential Anglican Bishop of Woolwich, England, in a recent and highly controversial book, "*Honest to God*," suggests that the traditional ways of talking about God are completely inadequate and to the modern mind utterly unintelligible. As a result, knowledgeable people are being driven away from their Lord and Creator. We must, therefore, advises the learned divine, demythologize theology and devise new ways to talk about and of God [15]. It was a similar purpose—namely to make religion meaningful to modern man—that moved Mohammad Iqbal, a Pakistani philosopher-poet, to call upon his fellow co-religionists to revise, and if necessary, reconstruct the fundamental Muslim theological assumptions [16].

The problem that both these scholars are trying to resolve is: Can we make religion relevant to the needs of modern man? Both answer in the affirmative, but with the stipulation that the basic religious presuppositions should be restated in terms comprehensible to the men and women of the twentieth century. This seems plausible enough, but is it really possible? Can we "modernize" theology, so to speak, and still preserve its basic tenets? Is it not possible that the original may be lost in the newly reconstructed? These are pertinent questions indeed and, therefore, require our wholehearted attention. Since our major concern in this study is Islam, we turn to examine it in light of the above questions.

We have already suggested that Islam is a universal religion, in that it claims to be the true guide for all peoples for all times. Hence, its message ought to be flexible enough to provide new insights and lend itself to fresh interpretations. If we turn to the Quran, we find that this precisely is the case. The Quran teaches that every generation is responsible for charting its own course [17]. We can certainly learn from past experience, but need not be bound by it. The present writer's own view is in agreement with the

15. Robinson, John T. *Honest to God*, The Westminister Press, Philadelphia, 1963, p. 7.

16. Mohammad Iqbal: *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, Sh. M. Ashraf Press, Lahore, 1958, p. 8.

17. The Quran: 13:11.

Quranic injunctions. I hold the opinion that the only good thing about the past is that it is past; we do not have to see it again. Every generation is confronted with problems profoundly different from those of generations that preceded it. These problems call for new solutions, and new solutions must be formulated if we are to make any progress at all. It is silly, even dangerous, to persist tenaciously in treading the old and worn paths when new situations loudly demand new approaches. Holding to old ways when fresh starts are called for is, to my mind, suicidal. Rigid conservatism has been the cause of ruin of many a people, through the ages. Small wonder, then, that the Quran does not approve such an attitude. It says:

And when it is said to them, "Follow that which Allah has sent down," they say, "Nay, we will follow that wherein we found our fathers." What! even if their fathers had no sense at all and no guidance? (The Quran, 2:171)

This verse indicates quite clearly that old ways are merely old and might well be erroneous and misleading. Enough for now. We shall have occasion to return to this all-important matter at a later stage.

One of the problems that has troubled theologians and philosophers of all monotheistic religions is: Can we reconcile the concept of an all-powerful God with the freedom of the will? In other words, is the idea of human action, based on free choice, compatible with the belief in a God who is said to be sovereign over the whole universe and has the foreknowledge of all that happens, and has the power to do all that He wills? A large number of non-Muslim scholars allege that Islam as a religion tends toward determinism [18]. They further accuse the Muslim God of being capricious and tyrannical—a Being in whose fearful presence man stands naked, defenseless, and excuseless [19]. From Him there is no escape.

Within Islam itself, the controversy has raged like a mighty storm. It began immediately after the demise of the Prophet, and as yet is far from settled. Its first vigorous formulation is found in the religious disputations between the Mutzalites and the Asharites—the two prominent sects in early Islam. The Mutzalites, whose founder was Wasil B. Ata, were a sect with rationalistic tendencies. They opposed the doctrine of the eternity of the

18. Gibb, H.A.R., *Mohammedanism*, New Am. Library, New York, 1958, p. 50.

19. Guillaume, A., Islam, R. & R. Clark, Ltd., Edinburg, 1961, pp. 132-135; Gib, H.A.R. and Cramer, J. H., editors. *Shorter Encyclopedia of Islam*. E. J. Brill, London, 1953, pp. 35-38.

Quran, asserting that the Quran was created. They also denied the notion of predestination and the possibility of the beatific vision. On the positive side, they maintained that man possesses free will. More than a century after Wasil B. Ata's death, a formidable theologian, Al-Ashari, who was at first an adherent of the Mutzalites, renounced their views and took up a definitely orthodox position. Al-Ashari and his followers, the Asharites, held that the Mutzalite principles were not justified by any scriptural authority. The Quran, they maintained, is eternal and the world and all that it contains was created by God from nothing. It was this view that latter found its vigorous exponent in Al-Ghazali, the great and revered theologian, and came to be generally accepted as the "correct" interpretation of Muslim theology." For centuries, to dispute it invited the lable of heresy. It seems obvious that the Mutzalite was the earliest deliberate attempt within Islam to subject the data of revelation to the scrutiny of reason, but the Asharites rushed to the defense of gross literalism and were triumphant. For our purposes, it is interesting to note that the Asharites were neither clear nor dogmatic in their views about predestination and free will. They must have recognized, as the Mutzalites did, the moral difficulty inherent in the assertion that God decreed evil and then punished man for committing it.

When we turn to the Quran, we find the following pertinent verses about the subject:

"Say, Nothing shall befall us save that which Allah has ordained for us. He is our protector. And in Allah should the believers put their trust." (The Quran, 9:51)

and again

"Surely Allah has the power to do all that He wills." (The Quran, 9:51)

These and some other verses, along with certain attributes of God, are usually offered as an indication of the deterministic outlook of Islam. But this is not altogether justified. I think that we should take the Quran as a whole. If we do this, we discover that the doctrine of free will is more often stated than the predestinarian attitude. For example, the Quran teaches us:

"And say, It is the truth from your Lord; wherefore, let him who will, believe, and let him who will, disbelieve." (The Quran 18:30)

and again:

"And if thy Lord had enforced His will, all who are on the earth would have believed together. Wilt thou then force men to become believers? (The Quran 10:100)

It seems obvious that total acceptance of predestination is not possible. It becomes possible only if one is willing to disregard such plain statements. At

least one thing is quite clear: the Quran declares that God grants us free choice in matters of belief and unbelief. It seems logical; therefore, that He should do likewise in all other matters. For, if we are allowed freedom in so important a matter as faith, it seems incredible that God will not permit freedom in less significant domains of human life. Thus, it seemingly behooves us to interpret the verses relating to predestination in light of the above. Further, if God has the power to do all that He wills, it does not necessarily follow that He will not will to grant us the gift of free choice. Neither does foreknowledge of coming events necessarily imply control of these events by the agent.

In any case, contemporary Muslim scholarship has rallied around the idea of free will, rejecting determinism—lock, stock, and barrel. Dr. Mohammad Iqbal while agreeing with the Asharites that the Quran is not only eternal, but literally the word of God, says:

The future certainly pre-exists in the organic whole of God's creative life, but it pre-exists as an open possibility, not as a fixed order of events with definite outlines. [20]

and again:

To my mind nothing is more alien to the Quranic outlook than the idea that the universe is the temporal working out of a pre-conceived plan [21].

and finally:

The truth is that the whole theological controversy relating to predestination is due to pure speculation with no eye to the spontaneity of life, which is a fact of actual experience [22].

One can surmise from Iqbal's general religious outlook that he is orthodox in the Asharite tradition. Nonetheless, I do not find it difficult to agree with him on the subject of determinism. I am fully in accord with his views when he says that ours is a world of open possibilities wherein an individual is free to formulate his own ends, purposes, and scales of value, if he is to actualize his inherent potentialities to the best of his capacities. The Quranic universe is a universe of constant change and flux; it is not a static mass of incomprehensible and unchanging entities. The deterministic outlook, if accepted in its totality, would seem to be such that it leaves no scope for free, responsible, moral agents. It is a world of puppets who, by

20. Iqbal, M., *op. cit.*, p. 76.

21. Iqbal, M., *op. cit.*, p. 55.

22. Iqbal, M., *op. cit.*, p. 76.

forces beyond their control, are made to play their respective roles on the stage of life. Moreover, if anything that has happened had to happen the way it did, and if future events are also predetermined, then it seems idle for man to put forth any effort whatever. Why not just sit and wait?

One more reason, and seemingly by far the most important one, for rejecting a predestinarian attitude is that it appears to pose a relationship between God and evil. That a loving and merciful God, whose bounty and grace are without limit, should punish man for doing what He Himself had ordained, seems unthinkable. It seems reasonable, therefore, to believe that God has granted man free will. Professor Grunebaum describes Islam as a religion of "sober reasonableness" [23]. He further argues that "the prophet was not sent to make life more difficult but to facilitate it" [24]. To believe in predestination is to deny both these plausible assumptions.

III. THE ISLAMIC CONCEPT OF MAN

The questions that remain for us to examine are as follows: (1) What is the nature of man? (2) What is the purpose of his existence? (3) What is the nature of his relationship to God and to the universe? In the following few pages, I shall address myself to these questions.

It seems to me that the Islamic world-view is essentially anthropocentric insofar as man occupies a place of supreme importance in the universe of created things. In Islam, man and his destiny become the center of all creation. It is to him that God reveals Himself, and the whole of nature is created for his use and his benefits. He shapes his own destiny as well as that of the universe. He is not an inert lump, incapable of doing anything "on his own." On the contrary, he is a rational being who interprets nature, and molds, fashions, and transforms it in the light of his own requirements. He is free. His existence is not predetermined by anything; his life is regulated on the basis of his own knowledge of things. The rest of creation is subjected to him. He is its center, its master, its king. The Holy Quran teaches us:

And He (God) has subjected to you whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is in the earth; all this is from Him. In that surely are signs for a people who reflects. (The Quran, 45:14)

The Quran puts man in a highly favorable position in the world. He is a rational being and has an immortal soul. He is the only being among created things who, in the vast and windy stretches of infinity, is capable of

23. Grunebaum, G.E.V. *Medieval Islam*, Second Edition, University of Chicago Press, 1961, p. 230.

24. Grunebaum, G.E.V., *Medieval Islam*, p. 230.

distinguishing between right and wrong. He is the only being who feels, suffers, fears, and hopes. God made him in His own image, and everything was created for his convenience. He is the finest flower of the universe, the noblest creature in the world. Says the Quran:

Indeed, we have honored the children of Adam. . .and given them of good things and exalted them far above many of those whom we have created. (The Quran: 17:71)

and again:

Surely, we have created man in the best of makes. (The Quran: 95:4)

It is clear from these verses that man is born with pure nature. He is both honorable and excellent. There is a Divine element in him, and he is capable of soaring higher and higher. He can, if he wishes and makes the necessary effort, leave the confines of brutism and reach the Divine precincts. He is the chosen of God and His viceregent on earth. Even the angels pay respect to him and are pressed into service by God to help him [25]. Let us turn to Iqbal the mystic when, speaking of man, he says:

No form of reality is so powerful, so inspiring, and so beautiful as the spirit of man! [26]

One is reminded of Pico della Mirandola's famous "*Oration on the Dignity of Man*." Pico, the Renaissance man himself, had learned a good deal from the Muslims and was honest enough to admit it [27].

The Holy Quran tells us that everything that God has created has a purpose. The world was not created in sport by a deity who had nothing better to do [28]. As we have already indicated, the paramount purpose of creation was man's benefit. Man was God's lieutenant on earth, the recipient of God's numerous bounties, and the object of His love and mercy. Does man, therefore, have any duties and obligations towards his creator? The Quran answers in the affirmative. The major end of man's life is to glorify the name of the Lord, sing His praises, and faithfully obey His commands. This apparently means that the sole purpose of man's life is to achieve nearness to God, do His will, win His pleasure, manifest His attributes in himself, and be His image. *Man's material, moral, and spiritual happiness is dependent upon how effectively he meets these responsibilities.* He can

25. The Quran: 2:37, 32, 35; 20:114.

26. Iqbal, M., *op. cit.*, p. 12.

27. Beatty and Johnson: *Heritage of Western Civilization: Selected Readings*, Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1959, p. 303

28. The Quran: 21:17, 18.

fulfill these obligations if, and only if, he is willing and capable of loving God, submerging himself in Him, imitating His ways, and living an upright and righteous life, free from sin and evil passions.

This is not to say that man should turn his back on the world and retire to the jungle for contemplation, in the manner of a hermit. Man cannot abdicate his responsibilities to his fellow men and to society. The attitude of withdrawal from the material aspect of existence has no place in the Quranic scheme of things. As we have already suggested, Islam makes no distinctions between the spiritual and the temporal. Time and time again, the Holy Quran draws our attention to the all-important task of developing nature for our benefit. Enlarging the bounds of human empire over nature is not merely a request; it is a command of God, and hence man's duty. Escapism in any shape or form is alien to the Quranic outlook. Whether Mr. Homo, particularly of the Islamic variety, has been able to carry out the task assigned him by his Creator is open to question, but there are no ambiguities shrouding the clear intent of the mission itself. Controlling nature and striving to bend it to our will is a duty.

Lest I should be accused of being guilty of misleading my readers by presenting Islam as a religion of rosy promises, I hasten to submit that I have no such intentions. Islam did not come with ear-pleasing promises alone. It demands good deeds from all of us. Each of us has to bear his own burden. We are accountable for our actions in this world and as well as in the next. The Holy Quran, by dividing human life into three stages—physical, moral, and spiritual—recognizes the brute in man. Humanization of the brute in us, by leading a moral and spiritual life, is said to be the goal of man's sojourn on earth [29]. Therefore, a true Muslim is aware, at all times, of the awesome majesty of God.

However, in order to emphasize certain humane and basically democratic elements in Islam, I should like to note that in Islam there is no ordained or privileged priesthood—every man is his own priest. There are no sacraments; there is no infallible interpreter of truth. All men are equal in the sight of God, whose majesty encompasses heaven and earth. Islam does not divide humanity into two Calvinistically predestined groups—"saved" and "unsaved." All of us are potentially saved. Sin is not an inheritance; it is an acquisition. Man, at the time of his birth, is a heavenly being free from taint of sin. Nor does the Quran regard the earth as a torture-hall, where an elementally wicked humanity is imprisoned for an original act of sin. Man

29. Ahmad, Hazrat., *op. cit.*, pp. 119-121.

does have the propensity to become sinful, but his potentiality to do good is no less significant. He has a self-transforming nature. Above all, God is a Loving Master, a Merciful Judge who never asks the returning sinner what he had been—only what he will be.

As I have already indicated, one basic principle of Muslim theology is the unity of the Godhead. Hand in hand with this idea goes the thought of unity of the human race. All men are brothers; all are children of God and equal in His eyes; all are members of the same family—the human race. The Holy Quran teaches that the earth is the dwelling place for all humanity, and a source of profit for all men. It says:

“And We have established you in the earth and provided for you therein the means of subsistence. (The Quran, 7:11)

At a time when man is set against man, nation against nation, race against race, we shall do well to remind ourselves of these noble precepts. Instead of engaging in cut-throat competition for worldly “honors,” let us try to outdo each other in good works, in virtue, in wisdom, and in knowledge. Let us make virtue the standard of distinction and honor—not nationality, or race, or creed, or color. And surely virtue, wisdom, and knowledge are attainable by all, black and white, yellow and brown, high and low. A Muslim scholar seemingly had this in mind when he wrote:

“Thus to teach, on the one hand, that there is one God for all and that His mercy and blessings as RABB are equally meant for all, and to announce, on the other, that all men are members of the same family, and that there are no such divisions in humanity as exist between the West and the East; and further, to level all distinctions of nation, race, color and community by upholding rectitude of action as the only mark of real distinction; and lastly to class all virtuous men as brothers to one another—are the four glorious achievements of Islam, the parallels of which are not to be found in the history of mankind [30].

IV. ISLAM AND OTHER RELIGIONS

It is sometimes alleged in an ecumenical spirit that all religions are fundamentally the same, i.e., they are merely different ways of getting at the same thing. In light of the foregoing this is simply false—a myth that must be exploded. How, for instance, Islam that is so uncompromisingly committed to the concept of oneness of God can be said to be the same as Christianity with its mathematically naive doctrine of trinity according to which for some entirely esoteric and inexplicable reasons three equal one and one

30. Kamal-ud-din: *Islam and Civilization*: 1937, p. 137.

equals three! Such examples can be multiplied *ad infinitum*. This is why perhaps that Muslim writers through the ages have taken great pains to enumerate those characteristics of Islam which they believe set it apart from all previous religious truths, abolition of the priesthood [31], the notion of man's accountability for his actions to God alone, the elimination of dualism between the religious and the secular, and equal emphasis, in terms of importance, on the life of *this world and the next* are characteristics peculiar to Islam.

If one wants further to distinguish Islam from other religious doctrines, one may emphasize its exhortations, entirely novel in the annals of religious thought, as to the importance of acquiring and spreading knowledge, *and on distinctly utilitarian grounds*.

All other religions before Islam, including Christianity, kept silent on this all-important subject. From Adam to Jesus, no messenger from God said more than little, if anything, about the matter of education. We find the same state of affairs when we turn to other teachers of religion. Though some branches of knowledge were cultivated by the Hindus of old, such cultivation was always confined to a priestly class. The lower classes in the Hindu caste system were strictly prohibited from interesting themselves in learning or teaching [32].

In light of this, it can be seen that it was the prophet of Arabia who made knowledge an essential of faith for his followers. He knew neither how to read nor how to write, but he drew men's attention to the importance of acquiring knowledge, because he thought it to be necessary in order to make full use of God's gifts to mankind. He, and the Book that he brought with him, told us of the treasures that lay hidden in seas and mountains, and in the heavens and on (as well as in) the earth. The term *knowledge* as used in the foregoing must be understood to mean scientific as well as non-scientific

31. We are fully aware that in Western Christendom, Martin Luther advocated the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers, a concept closely analogous to the Muslim view on the subject. However, in terms of history, Luther was a johnny-come-lately, and might well have been a me-too-ist. Available evidence points to the possibility that he was familiar with Muslim religious writings. Anyhow, there is no doubt that he had, among other things, studied the Quran. See: Southern, R. W. *Western Views of Islam in the Middle Ages*, Harvard U. Press, Cambridge, 1962, pp. 104-109.

32. Ahmad, Hazarat Mahmood, *Introduction to the Study of Holy Quran*, Hollen Press, London, 1949, p. 74.

knowledge. Add to this the fact that Islam is the only major religion that has existed in the full light of history, the distinguishing features of Islam vis a vis other religions become clear and distinct. Under the circumstances to say that Islam is not in any significant way different from other religious creeds is to misunderstand Islam.

* * * * *

Continued from page 10.

your rescue. I see cities fall and settlements laid waste. The One and the Only God kept silent for long. Heinous deeds were done before His eyes and He said nothing. But now He shall reveal His face in majesty and awe. Let him who has ears hear that the time is not far. I have done my best to bring all under the protection of God but it was destined that what was written should come to pass. Truly do I say, that the turn of this land, too, is approaching fast. The times of Noah shall reappear before your eyes and your own eyes will be witnesses to the calamity that overtook the cities of Lot. But God is slow in His wrath. Repent that you may be shown mercy! He who does not fear Him is dead not alive".

(*Haqiqatul Wahy* pp. 256-57).

Our last word is: All praise belongs to Allah, the Lord of the worlds.

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